

# WHITE PAPER

## WHAT'S BEST FOR TECH COMPANIES... 'I', 'T', 'PI' OR 'BROAD LINE' SHAPED PRESALES SKILLS?

What does an 'I', 'T', 'Pi' and 'Broad line' have to do with PreSales professionals and how does it help Tech companies solve the problem of needing customer-facing expertise across an increasingly broad range of products and solutions? Read on...

Within Human Resources (HR) and Learning & Development (L&D), the idea of the modern employee needing 'T' shaped skills isn't new; it was first discussed back in 1991.

The vertical bar of the 'T' represents the idea of having deep skills and expertise in a single area; the horizontal bar represents 'boundary crossing competencies' (like teamwork, communication, perspective, understanding of different cultures) and the ability to collaborate with others across those competencies.

### How This Translates For PreSales

For PreSales professionals, the concept of being 'T'- shaped takes us further by describing a very particular challenge we have.

For most Tech companies, they started life selling a single product or service. Everyone responsible for demonstrating (starting from the Founder, the first Sales people then eventually the PreSales team) was expected to have deep knowledge and passion of the product, its benefits, value and use-cases.

As time goes by, Tech companies tend to expand their offering:

- Organically: Think of SAP developing their own software over many years from Finance & Controlling (FICO) into Manufacturing, Supply Chain, CRM and onwards.
- By Acquisition: Think of Salesforce buying ExactTarget to create the Salesforce Marketing Cloud, Sage acquiring Intacct and back to SAP buying SuccessFactors to get into Cloud based Human Capital Management (HCM) market.

For PreSales this presents a huge issue.

*Is it possible, or even practical, for the same PreSales Solution Consultant to have deep knowledge and credibility in all their company's offerings?*

In a perfect world, that's exactly what all Buyers, Prospects, Clients and Sales Execs want; for one PreSales professional to be able to turn up at any live or virtual sales event and be able to demonstrate, talk authoritatively and credibly, and have the industry and use-case knowledge of all your products or solutions. The ideal is that PreSales can respond to any business pain the prospect reveals (as long as your Sales Exec can sell the solution!).

And here's the million dollar question...

*What is the ideal breadth of knowledge and competence for a single PreSales Solution Consultant?*

Unfortunately, there's no single right answer. It depends on, amongst other factors:

- the breadth of your solutions and go-to-market strategy,
- how many products can be sold as self-service offerings (i.e. Product Led Growth) as opposed to those that need Enterprise-level sales support
- the capability and capacity of the PreSales team to build new skills,
- how the team are recruited, developed, trained, enabled, incentivised and how performance is measured,
- your company's culture, organisational structure and, sometimes, where the P&L is held (Profit and Loss held at country, region, industry, product range...) and
- the expectations of your prospects.

What do other Tech companies do?

Finally we get to the 'I', 'T', 'Pi', and 'Broad line'. What do they mean and how are they used?

As well as being passionate (if you're not, no-one else will be), convincing, credible, articulate and personable, PreSales can have the following shaped skills:

## 'I' Shaped

'I'-Shaped (the letter I, not the number 1) = Deep skills in only one solution or product area (the single, vertical 'I'). Can engage and educate, is knowledgeable and credible, not just about what the solution does, but the value it creates and how it can create customer success.

You sometimes see the result of having only 'I' profile PreSales when large enterprise software companies turn up on 'en masse' on a client Zoom because they need one PreSales professional to cover Procurement, one to cover Mobility, one to cover the Database, one to cover Business Intelligence and one to cover HCM and they're accompanied by multiple Sales people, an Account Director, two overlay Sales, a database Sales person, their Sales Manager etc.

It can be utterly embarrassing and self-defeating to turn up on a client Zoom with 10 PreSales and Sales colleagues when you're only presenting to 3 people from the client because you're covering a broad product set.

## 'T' Shaped

'T'-Shaped = Deep skills in a single solution or product area (the vertical 'I') AND a general understanding of the whole portfolio, architecture, ecosystems offerings and services (the horizontal bar on the 'T'). Here a PreSales professional can explain context across technology, line of business and industry. They can whiteboard and even architect the wider solution and the value it creates. They can spot cross-sell, co-sell and up-selling opportunities.

This is the model many Tech companies aim for. It needs a very heavy investment in enablement and strong leadership with a clearly articulated vision of what 'T' shaped skills look like and close performance monitoring to maintain.

## 'Pi' Shaped

'Pi'-Shaped (symbol looks like a T with two legs) = Exactly the same as a 'T' but with deep skills in more than one solution or product area. For many Tech companies, the 'T' shaped model is no longer enough.

Most Tech companies now acquire other Tech companies to gain new markets and leapfrog product development cycles. This means the number of products or services a Tech company sells rapidly proliferates so there can be literally thousands of different products and solutions available (at least at the sales booking line). There can be huge pressure for PreSales to double or triple-up their deep solution areas to cope with the pressures on sales to sell the whole portfolio.

## Broad Bar Shaped

"Broad bar" = Exactly the same as a 'T' but WITHOUT the deep skills. These are the modern PreSales generalists. We're starting to see a lot more of these generalist, 'advisor' roles across the profession.

To cope with expansive product portfolios, some Tech companies try to split their PreSales team into 'Broad bar' generalists, who do most of the initial engagement with prospects, and 'I' shaped specialists to handle deep dives and Proof of Concepts (PoCs) / Proof of Value (PoVs). The 'I' shaped PreSales specialists might work for a regional rather than local (country or state) team or could be remote; primarily working virtually, near or off-shore.

For larger enterprise clients, with larger buying groups, more complex needs, and a longer buying journey, a dedicated generalist PreSales professional, leading a team of more specialist PreSales professionals, can be a formidable competitive weapon.